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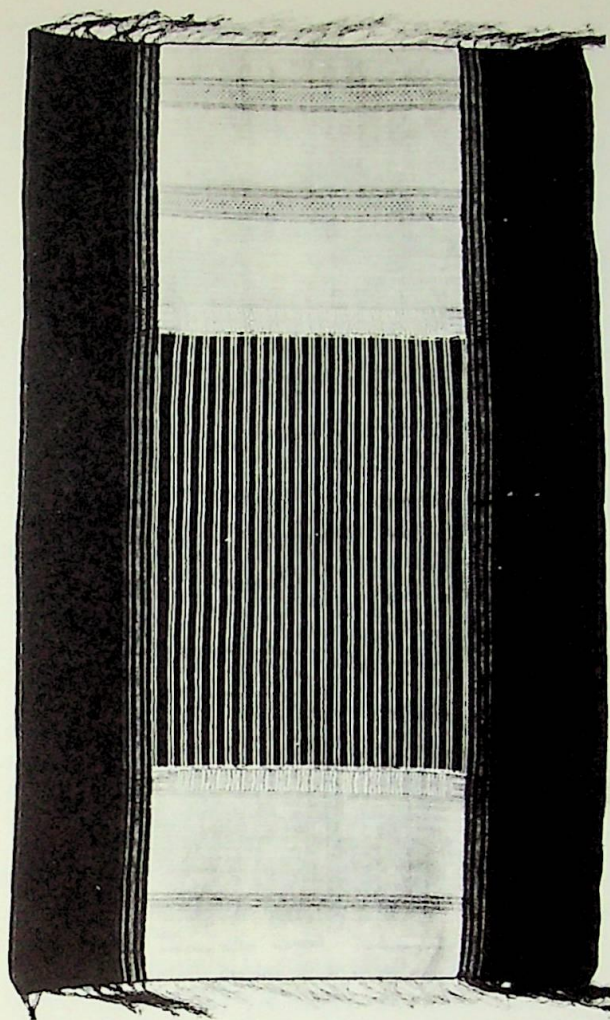


Fig. 1 A Batak *ragidup* (78×41 in.) Textile Museum Collection. 1969.37.1

SELECTED BATAK TEXTILES: TECHNIQUE AND FUNCTION

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Textiles made by the Batak of Indonesia lack exotic designs and display only somber colors, yet they claim interest because of their continuing dominant role in the social and religious life of the people. For example, customary law obligations,

traditionally termed *adat* in Indonesian, are still met by locally crafted textiles which the Batak call *ulos*. This is so even though more luxuriant cloths are readily available in the indigenous markets, and less expensive cloth is produced in several local factories. Beyond their functions as sarongs and shoulder cloths the *ulos* encompass concepts of fertility, protection, longevity and, perhaps, are a metaphoric structure for time itself. In addition, some of these cloths have technical features not commonly found in other Indonesian textiles that make them worthy of examination.

Variations in cultural practices and minor language differences subdivide the Batak who live in northern Sumatra into smaller ethnic groupings. Most of these groups weave textiles of a distinctive nature that readily serve as badges of ethnic identity. Of all the varieties, however, two woven by the Toba Batak are of the greatest technical and cultural interest.

RAGIDUP

The Toba Batak consider the *ragidup* their primary *ulos* and the raja of their cloths.¹ An example in the Textile Museum (Fig. 1) shows the characteristic sections which make up this dark maroon cotton textile. Two long, lateral panels are joined by a simple overcast stitch to a tripartite central section. In the lateral panels there are usually three to four narrow warp stripes and at least one of these, called the *jugia*, has designs effected by white supplementary warps. The stripes are white and red but occasionally a few blue warp yarns will form part of this decoration. In the center of the cloth two white end panels bound a dark central zone. The latter is patterned by thin evenly spaced warp stripes which may be either red, blue or black and frequently the stripes frame warp ikat designs of simple dashes, V-shaped forms or diamond patterns.² Designs in the white end panels are worked by black (and, rarely, a few red) supplementary wefts on a plain weave foundation. These as well as the other parts of the cloth show a warp-faced weave. A thin band of twining secures the fringes which are then plied and twisted.

Traditionally handspun cotton yarns, some dyed by the involved techniques required in Turkey red dyeing using *Morinda citrifolia*, were the primary materials of the *ragidup*. However, today commercially spun cotton yarns prepared with chemical dyes—maroon, red, blue and black—are used by the weavers.³ Typically, a somber maroon color predominates in the *ragidup* but there are regions in which a lusterless black appears as the major color in the center and side panels.

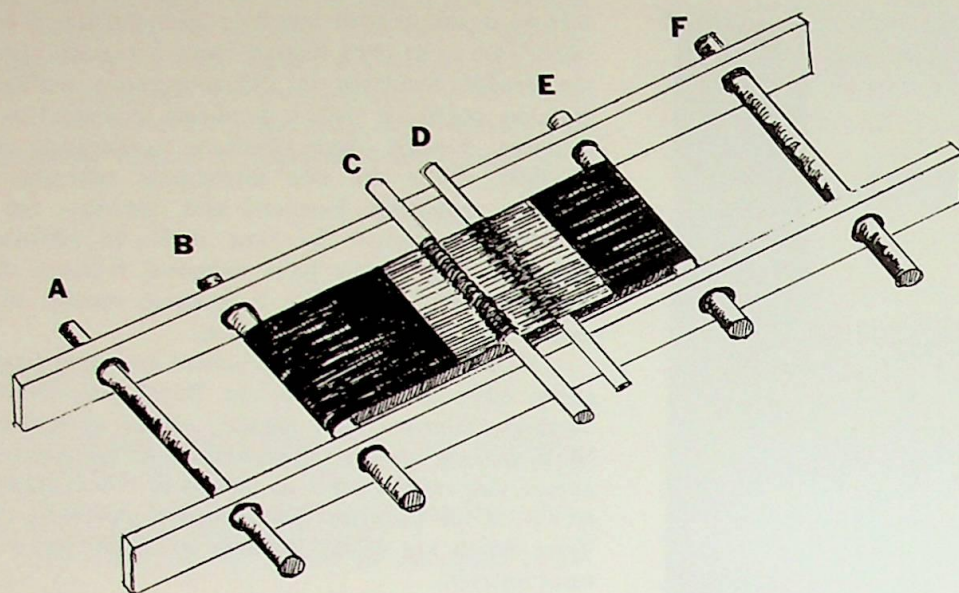


Fig. 2 A schematic drawing of the *antaran*, a frame used to hold a partially woven textile while a new warp is incorporated.

An exotic detail of this *ulos* is the joining of dark and light warps to form the end panels in the center section. This feature, as well as the manner in which it is effected, is singular to the Batak and has no parallel elsewhere in Indonesia. The work is done with the aid of a rather casually assembled frame called *antaran* (schematically drawn in Fig. 2) which may be braced across the back of two chairs or other convenient objects that will accommodate the heavy side planks. First, however, the weaver weaves the striped central portion of the cloth using the customary back tension loom having a continuous warp. When 10 to 15 inches of warp are all that remain unwoven she places the loom in the frame (Fig. 2) inserting the breast beam B and the warp beam E in their appropriate holes. Still remaining on the unfinished warp are, of course, the single heddle C and the *balobus* D, a stick inserted to maintain the crossing in place of the awkward roll bar which normally appears in this location during the weaving process. The weaver now proceeds to stretch a new warp of white yarns between the more distant bars A and F. The yarn originates at A, passes through a lease of the heddle which still carries the warp of the maroon cloth, goes under the *balobus* at D and around F, back over the *balobus* and through the interval between leases returning to the beam A. This warping continues until an entirely new warp of white yarns exists on top and in conjunction with the original maroon warp. Using the single heddle and its opposite member, the *balobus*, the weaver resumes weaving, only now both maroon

and white warps are simultaneously locked into place by each new weft. Four or five wefts are sufficient to secure the new warps. The whole is then turned in the frame and the other ends of the new white warps are secured in a similar manner to the far end of the maroon warps. These white yarns now complete a new tubular shape and the short constraining maroon warps are cut. The newly lengthened warp is now worked on the back tension loom as usual. However, rather than weave one entire panel, the weaver makes the wide design band at the top of one white panel, called *pinar halak*, then reverses the entire warp in the loom and completes the top design band on the other panel. She will complete this white panel and re-



Fig. 3 Woman near Tarutung weaves the *pinar halak* on the extended warp of the *ragidup*. Huta Galung, North Sumatra.

verse the warp once more to finish weaving the first panel. The weaver in Fig. 3 has completed the *pinar halak* on one end of the white warp which may just be seen in the lower level of the webs to the left. She is in the process of weaving the top row of the second panel and has already inserted some of the pattern sticks to finish this end of the cloth. She hand selects some combinations of warp threads in addition to those enumerated by 60 pattern sticks called *lili* to form the *pinar halak*. Many more pattern sticks are used in the remainder of the panel but some of those used for simpler design elements are saved in position and reused in the patterning.

While not as exotic, the manufacture of the two lateral panels of the *ragidup* has its unusual features as well. The warps for both panels are carried in tandem on the loom with an intervening space in the center which allows for the manipulation of the shuttles (Fig. 4). Shared between the two warps are a single sword, heddle, roll bar and set of pattern sticks to create the supplementary warp stripes, while each set of warps has its individual temple and shuttle. The two women in Figs. 3 and 4 work jointly to produce a completed cloth and by working eight to ten hours a day they are able to finish one cloth a week. The final step is the joining of the three sections and the twining of the fringe ends. This latter work, however, is found more extensively on another textile woven in this region.

The technical complexity consciously employed to manufacture the *ragidup* textile raises many questions, which seem to have no satisfactory answers. Why the Batak choose to interlock the two colored warps rather than weave separate textiles which could then be joined by a seam is



Fig. 4 A second woman weaves both side panels of the *ragidup* in tandem on the loom. Huta Galung, North Sumatra.

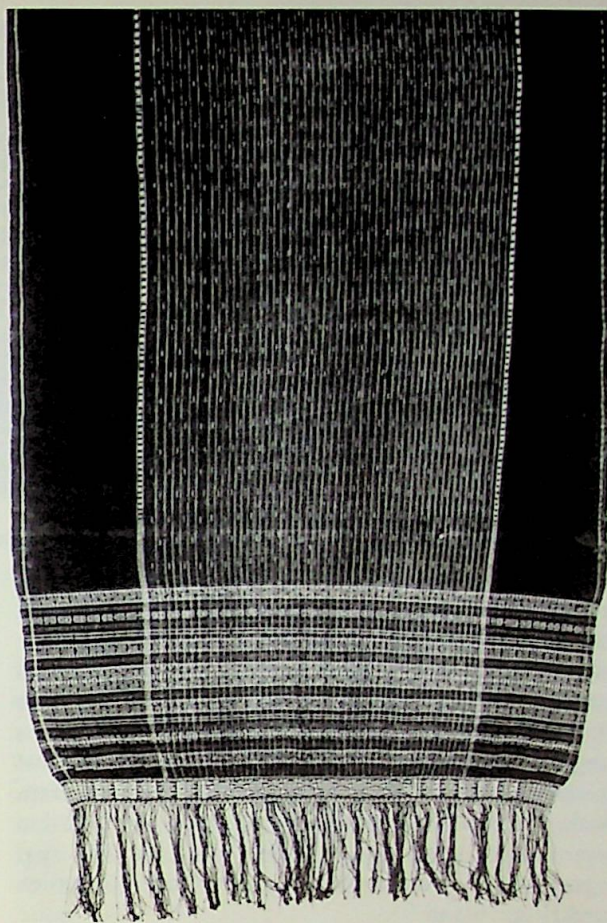


Fig. 5 A Batak *ragi hotang* (82×33 in.) Textile Museum Collection. 1969.37.3

perplexing, especially in a textile that already employs seaming as a feature. Also there seems to be no technical reason to weave first one *pinar halak* and then the other before completing one entire white panel. The reasons for these practices may lie in forgotten magico-religious sources rather than in the realm of weaving practices.

RAGI HOTANG

A second cloth woven by the Toba Batak which contains an interesting technical feature is the *ragi hotang*. An example in the Textile Museum (Fig. 5) is typical. It has a single cotton panel with a dark blue or black central zone flanked by broad reddish-brown lateral bands all woven in a warp faced plain weave. The dark center carries many fine white parallel warp stripes and barely perceptible lighter dashes created in the warp by the ikat process. Near the ends of the cloth supple-



Fig. 6 Detail from the twined border of a *ragi hotang*. Jakarta Central Museum Collection. 3807 (Total cloth 84×32 in.)

mentary wefts create simple white or occasionally red patterns across the weft dimension. The crowning glory of the cloth, however, is the twined border which finishes the fringe ends. Such borders frequently are two inches deep and may have a range of background colors which act as contrast to the white designs. Most often, however, red, black and white are employed. Narrow borders are twined on a majority of Batak *ulos* but the *ragi hotang* alone displays this wider more complex band (Figs. 6 and 9).

This complex twining requires only modest implements. One is called the *songkar*, a thin bowed stick or bowed piece of bamboo with a metal hook inset at each end. The hooks catch the selvage edges of the woven cloth near the fringe to main-

tain a tautness as well as a stable dimension across the weft, much as the temple does while weaving. The only other tool used is the *potir* or *hoting-hoting*⁴, a three to three-and-a-half inch narrow slat with a hole in each end. The weaver (Fig. 8) passes a different color yarn through each of the holes in the *potir*. They come together and are tied into the fringe of the cloth where the twining is to commence. Beyond the *potir* the weaver secures the two yarns by loosely wrapping them around her big toe. The *potir* thus creates a permanent shed which separates the two colored yarns and the weaver's leg and foot maintain tension of the yarns to be twined. To do the twining she catches a group of six to eight warp fringes and inserts them into the V-shaped opening of the colored

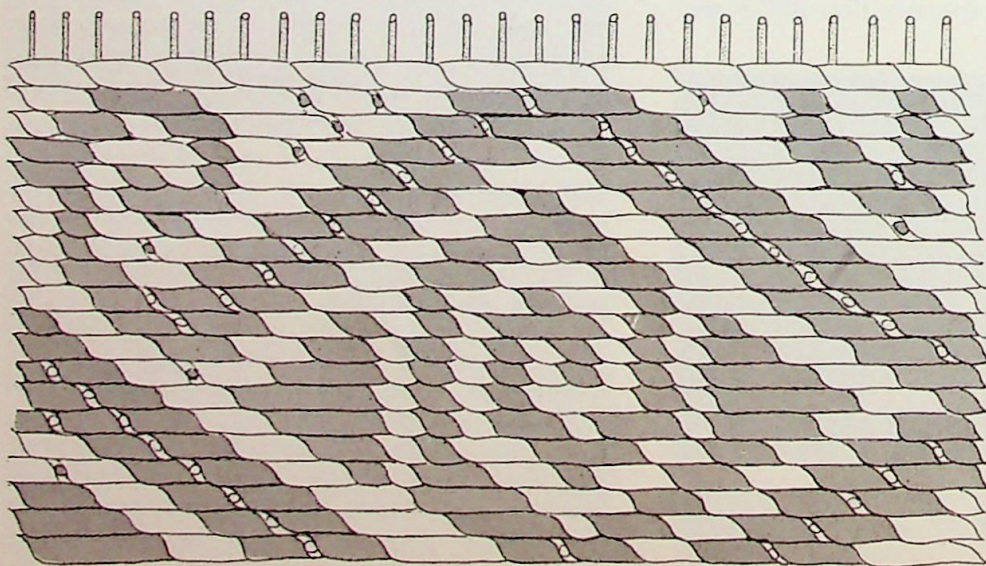


Fig. 7 Details from 20 of the 79 rows of twining present in the border of Fig. 6. When the weaver wants to continue a single color on one face for an extended length she anchors the twining yarns by making a full 360° turn with the upper and lower yarns. The portion rendered here is 1.1 inches long. Each warp bundle represents approximately six warps.

yarns, and then brings them back to the face of the cloth by passing them around the far arm of the V-opening. By holding this warp group firmly against the cloth body a tension is created which rotates the paired colored yarns 180 degrees. The alternate colored yarn coming from the *potir* which was on the left now swings to the right. This is now acted upon by drawing a new group of warp fringe through the V opening. As this is brought back to the cloth surface the new tension spins the colored yarns and the first color returns to the right-hand side of the V-opening, ready to be acted upon again. The continual turning of the colored yarns as the warps are inserted twists and plies these yarns where they are secured to the weaver's toe. To release this tension she periodically loosens the yarns from her foot, shakes out the unwanted twists and, after giving herself slightly more yarn with which to work, rewraps the yarns about her toe. The work proceeds rapidly and when she has twined all of one row she reverses the cloth and makes the succeeding row by working on the reverse face of the textile.

In the more simple twined designs the warp fringes may be plied before the twining begins but this is not done in the more complex pieces such as the border from a *ragi hotang* in the Jakarta Central Museum (Figs. 6 and 7). The twining in this example is 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches deep and begins with a natu-

ral colored white yarn twined with a red. Their twists enclose an average of six warps. A second row repeats the first exactly. A third row now splits the original groupings of warp and creates new groups from the halves. This is repeated in a fourth row. Two additional rows divide these groupings into the original warp groups. The weaver then utilizes a single color, red-brown, and twines nine rows in which she redivides the warp groupings of each successive row. This creates a diagonal or twill twined area which acts as a frame to the major design of the border. A similar monochrome diagonal twining structure is repeated beyond the main design in ten rows which finish the edging as a whole. In all, the border contains 79 rows of twining.

The designs in the center of the Jakarta piece (Figs. 6 and 7) are achieved by inserting two or even three warp groups of six yarns each into the same V-opening made by the *potir*. This allows one color yarn to run on the surface of the cloth over the several warp groups while its paired element does the same on the reverse face. In the areas where the weaver wants to extend this single colored yarn more than three warp groups, she makes a full 360° turn with the upper and lower twining yarns without enclosing any warp groupings. This anchors both elements yet allows each to remain on its original face. In a few instances



Fig. 8 A woman twines the border of a *ragi hotang*. Here she releases the tension in the yarns anchored to her toe. Laguboti, North Sumatra.

when such an anchor is required one of the twining elements will catch a single warp yarn, but this is not common.

The skill in such craftsmanship lies in maintaining a constant tension between the colored twining elements and the warp groupings which are drawn back and held momentarily on the body of the cloth while the next warp group is inserted into the V-opening. If these are pulled too tightly or too loosely great variations result in the length of the twine, bringing a distortion to the pattern. Also, an accurate tabulation is necessary of the various combinations of warp groups to effect the design accurately and for this the weaver uses no mnemonic devices but carries the necessary combinations in her head—a rather formidable task.

Women lacking these skills can employ another method to border their cloths which will result in the same designs. Two colored yarns are continuously wrapped between two simple upright pegs. The distance between these uprights is the same as the weft dimension of the cloth to be decorated. These yarns now become a simple warp worked by short sticks and the plied and twisted fringes of the woven cloth are inserted as the weft element. The result, of course, is a woven, not a twined pattern that is considered inferior to the more tightly executed twined designs. The difference can be seen by comparing the border at the top of Fig. 9 which is true twining, with the lower border in the same figure which is a woven imitation of such work. Women who do one of these decorative modes rarely do the other and some can do neither one. Frequently this detail is jobbed to another person. Few actually possess the knowledge to do the intricate borders required on the

ragi hotang and most of these *ulos* which are woven only in the Balige region are sent to be twined to the nearby area of Laguboti where the work is done for Rs. 1,000 (U.S.\$2.50) a cloth.

DESIGN FEATURES

Today few can speak of the meaning of the designs but all believe the special design assemblages such as those in the twined border of the *ragi hotang* may favorably or unfavorably align with one's soul. A prospective buyer usually consults an elder who has the ability to determine if the designs of a particular cloth will "harmonize" with his *tondi*, or soul, and answers to such questions as the date and time of birth determine whether a cloth will ensure benevolent happenings when worn. These cloths with their designs and the *ragidup* assemblage are *namarsintuhu*, or meaningful, to the Toba and are interpreted before purchase.

When names are applied to designs these often derive from factors quite divorced from the actual representation. For example, the border design on the Textile Museum's *ragi hotang* (Fig. 5) would be called *sirat ama*, man's design, because traditionally such twining was done only by men, yet if the border had been executed by the supplementary weaving procedure described above which is done only by women, it would be termed *sirat ina*, women's design (lower example in Fig. 9).

All of the twined designs were originally done by men and are said to derive from the carved and painted decorations on the traditional Batak house. Indeed, a mother and daughter-in-law interviewed in Laguboti had learned to twine from the former's



Fig. 9 Details of two *ragi hotang* borders. The top example was twined and the lower specimen was done by a weaving process. Laguboti, North Sumatra.

husband who not only twined cloth borders, but also carved and painted houses. These structures are pile supported dwellings with large dynamically sweeping saddle-shaped roofs. The whole of the complex wooden facade and sides are covered with a welter of scrolls, tendrils, trees and human forms which are incised and painted red, black and white. (A portion of one of these houses may be seen in the background of Fig. 11.) Tendrils frequently occur in the twined borders of the Toba *ulos* and the colors chosen for this border, as well as almost all twining, are the same as those on the houses. Although there is little correlation between other designs appearing on the houses and cloths, similarities may once have existed.

The faint slashes of pale short ikatted lines between the stripes in the body of the cloth (Fig. 5) give the *ulos* its name, *ragi hotang*, rattan pattern. These light dashes imitate similar markings on rattan which is a symbol of long life to the Batak. Designs formed by supplementary wefts on these cloths resemble those in the white panel of the *ragidup* and, according to some informants, are recent additions to the *ragi hotang*. Originally the cloth's format included only the stripes with their ikat patterns and the *sirat godang*, the large twined border.

It is highly unusual in Indonesia for men to take part in the fabrication of textiles, even such work as the twined borders. The reason the Batak men have traditionally done the twining may lie in the magical nature ascribed to the three colors black, red and white and the use of such three colored strings by men in sacred ceremonies.⁵ In a ritual context the three colored threads symbolize the triad of cosmic levels—the lower, middle and upper worlds⁶—and are one of several symbols that continually reiterate this division. The constant repetition of these basic colors in the twined string borders worked by men suggests there may be a relationship in the significance of these ceremonial and mundane objects.

Of the designs actually woven into the cloths the most widely recognized is the large topmost row in the white panels of the *ragidup* called *pinar halak*. This Batak term may be broadly translated as "the personification of a human being."⁷ The characteristics of the motif repeated across this row determine whether the panel is regarded as male or female. However, informants frequently applied different criteria to determine the gender of the designs and the designations of one group could be interpreted in the opposite manner by another. More significant is their realization that the cloth's designs have to include the totality of both male and female elements. The other designs

in each of the two white panels differ in their sequential order though not necessarily in kind and frequently the same elements appear on both the male and female side. Only occasionally do visual or representational stimuli seem to lie at the base of the names for these forms as may be seen in a cloth woven near Balige. Names applied in Fig. 10a and b are:

- 1 Ipon-ipon—teeth
- 2 Baoa ni jungkit—male figure or design
- 3 Raja ni jungkit—king of the male figures
- 4 Ansisibang—centipede
- 5 Hait humusor—changing the heddle
- 6 Tupai marhait—hooked white panel (i.e. the panel in the cloth)
- 7 Siduruhan—a word used in reference to something that has fallen
- 8 Sigumang na himpol—whole water-beetle
- 9 Sigumang sambola—one-half of water beetle
- 10 Anak-anak ni jungkit—children of the design
- 11 Ipon-ipon—teeth
- 12 Ipon-ipon—teeth
- 13 Pinar halak—personification of a human. This name applies to the broad, top-most row.
- 14 Boru-boru ni jungkit—female figure or design

Other names of designs appearing on the *ragidup* mentioned in a source dating back to 1912⁸ are: butterflies, pinchers of a beetle, fallen pieces of a fragrant plant and seeds of the cucumber. Others duplicate names mentioned above, such as teeth and waterbeetle. Some names cited in the 1912 book were translated differently, for instance: *siduruhan* is said to mean side or edge and the similar *hait marhusor* as twisted hook. This early text also uses the terms *baoa*, *boru-boru* and *pinar halak* in relation to the top row and gives pictures of designs virtually identical to those found today.

However, both in the early part of the century and today, people seem incapable of naming all of the designs and what identities may be found do not lead to profound interpretations. Initial analysis suggests that the aggressive elements of the centipede and teeth were protective features surrounding the dominant male and female elements. To the Batak, teeth are a characteristic of the animal realm and before entering the adult world both

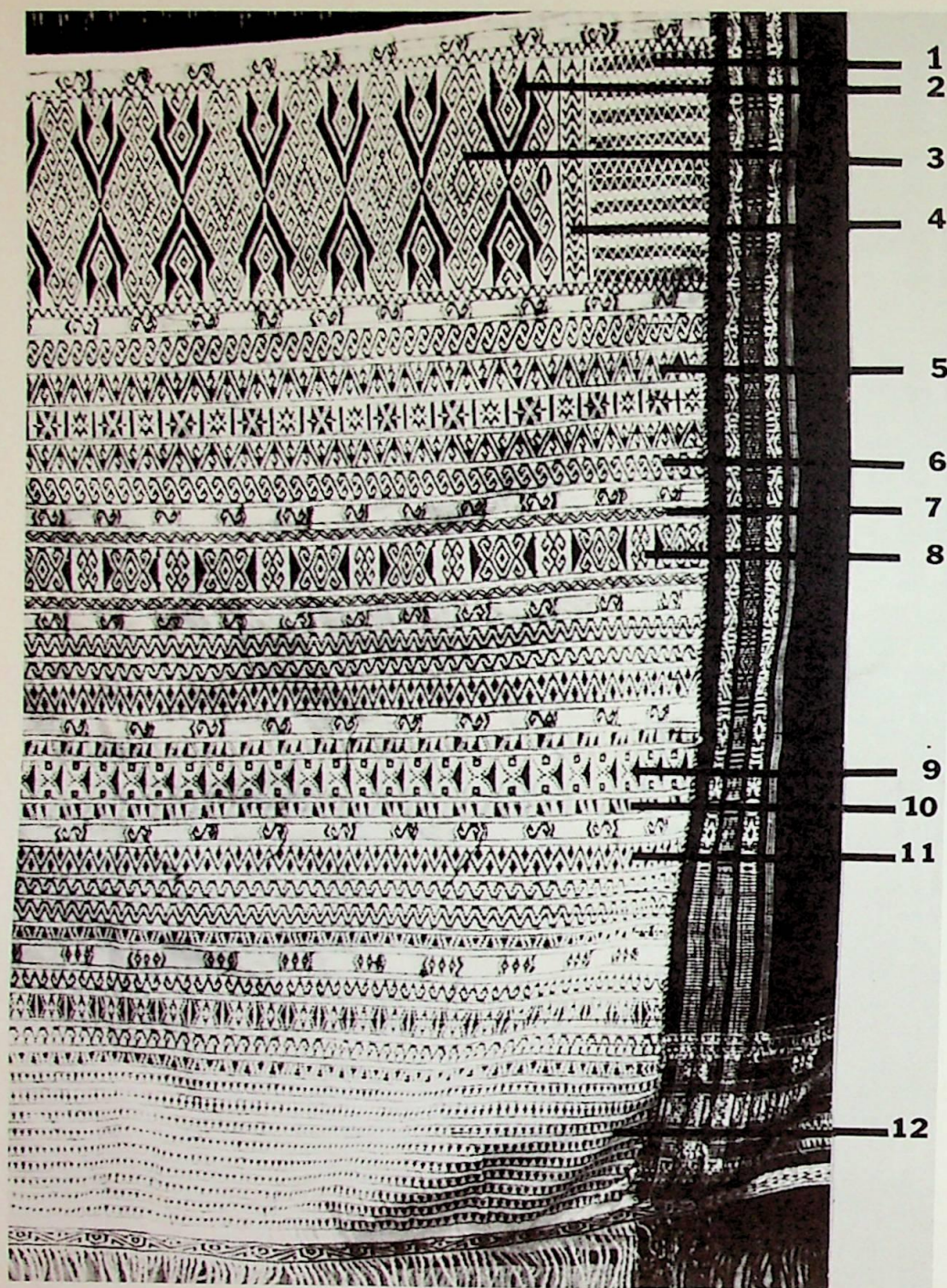
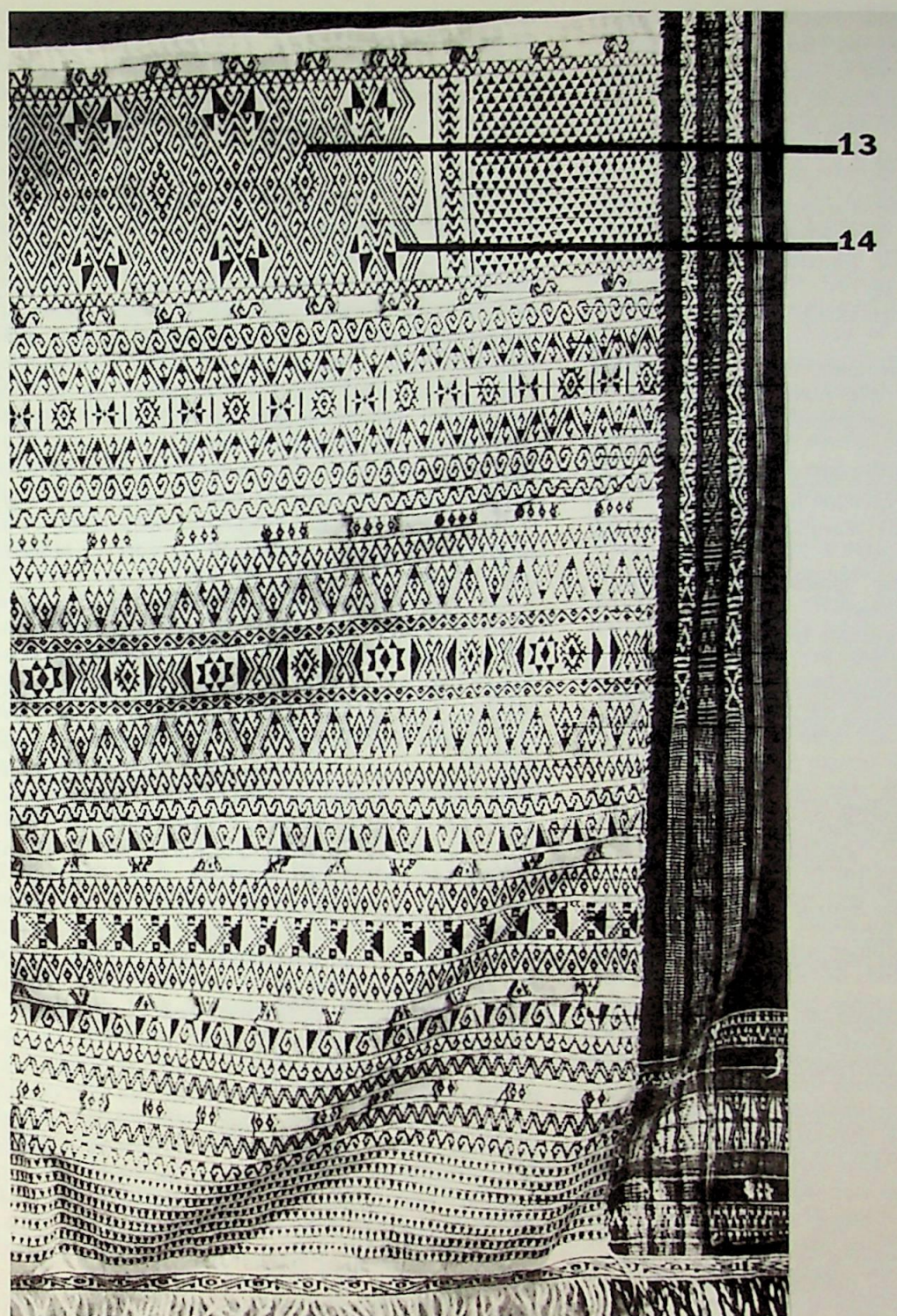


Fig. 10 a and b (opposite page) Details from two white panels of a *penunsaan*.¹ A textile in the personal collection of the Panjaitan family, Bogor, Java.

men and women traditionally had their incisors filed and blackened.⁹ The placement of these design elements, the teeth and centipede, suggests their intent was to ward off potential evil. When questioned about the significance of designs other than those in the *pinar halak* the Batak tend to give platitudinous explanations that they are wishes for children, riches, esteem and honor. Such a lack of detailed knowledge prevents a full

understanding of the total intellectual scheme represented, but we may assume with confidence that the designs are traditional and stem from a venerable past.

Surprisingly, when individuals enumerate what makes a good *ragidup*, the designs themselves do not seem as critical as do particular details in the total composition. One informant insisted the warp stripes of the central section of the *ragidup*



had to line up with small black spots woven in the white end panels, another that there must always be a thin blue stripe in the lateral panels near the *jugia* stripe, and J. E. Jasper claimed the number of rows in the white panels always had to be uneven. He mentions 35 rows on the male panel and

33 on the female.¹⁰ It is evident that a diverse body of semi-private mythology centers on this particular type of *ulos*.

All agree that the designs in the white end panels of the *ragidup* can be read by knowledgeable persons to prognosticate future fortune. Ac-

cording to Raja Sipakko Napitupulu of Balige, himself an interpreter of the cloths, only the *pinar halak* on the female panel is read. To do this each of the major design elements in this horizontal row is counted-off vis-a-vis a line in a poem, the final line then leading to further interpretation. A poem he used was:

Tuat boru	The Parapat girl goes down
Parapet	(or descends)
Nangkok boru	The Simalungun girl climbs
Simalungun	up
Tua ni na	Fortunate is the powerful
marsangap	
Tua ni na	Fortunate is the one blessed
maulibulung	(with many children)
Molo so	If not powerful
marsangap	
Mangkunti	Will wear the mourning cloth
tujung	over her head
Nangkok boru	The Parapat girl climbs up
Parapat	
Tuat boru	The Simalungun girl goes
Simalungun	down
Tua ni na	Fortunate is the powerful
marsangap	
Tua ni na	Fortunate is the one blessed
maulibulung	(with many children)

A similar verse from a woman originating in Tarutung¹¹ has slight variations:

Tuat boru	Ms. Parapat goes down (a
Parapat	hill)
Nangkok boru	Ms. Simalungun climbs up (a
Simalungun	hill)
Tua ni na	The fortunate one is lucky
martua	
Sahat	Because she will have many
maulibulung	descendants
Ia na so	If not fortunate
martua	
Dilangkopi	She will be covered with leaves
bulung-	over her grave
blung	

Such diagnostic reading is especially important when it accompanies the *ragidup* parents give as an *ulos ni tondi* or soul cloth to their daughter pregnant for the first time. Traditionally, the cloth was woven for the individual person and reading of the completed work was an extremely serious undertaking. It was believed the entire fate of the young mother was encoded in the textile and this was apparently inescapable. One story relates that the reading of the designs foretold such cata-

strophic events that the *ulos* was quietly traded out of the community without telling the pregnant woman. A new cloth, having more fortunate design combinations was made, but the calamities forecast in the original pursued the woman through her life.¹²

The origin of the *ragidup* arises from the mythical past. According to Raja Napitupuli although the Batak possessed the ikatted indigo *ulos sibolang*, it was only after their mythical heroine brought them the necessary skills could they weave the *ragidup*. The designs of scrolls, diamonds, hooked lozenge shapes, circles and tangents and squared meaders speak also of their antiquity. These forms and their arrangement in tightly zoned and segmented areas are characteristics of the design complexes associated with the early bronze casting period in Southeast Asia. There seems little doubt that the cloths have roots deep within the Batak past. These conclusions seem amply justified when the cloths are placed in their social and religious context.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Allegiance and obligation for a Batak center in his patrilineal lineage, called a *marga*, and, upon marriage, with the lineage of the spouse. Between these two groups who stand in a relationship of bride givers termed *hula-hula* and bride takers called *anak boru* there is a tightly structured system of reciprocal gift exchange that endures even beyond the death of the individual.

In this exchange all the gifts stemming from the *hula-hula* are called *ulos* and these are juxtaposed to those from the male's family which carry the name *piso* meaning sword or knife. These terms, to some degree, are used only in a categorical sense in that knives are never given but rather goods which are considered masculine such as money, carabou or pigs. In contrast, the *ulos* designation, while including other items, still largely demands actual transfer of traditionally woven cloth. The directional flow of these items is irreversible; gifts suitable for the *hula-hula* to give would never be given by the *anak boru*.

Even a cursory examination explains why textiles form the feminine classificatory gift par excellence. Women were traditionally responsible for the cultivation of the cotton, its harvesting, cleaning, spinning and, as today, dyeing, starching and weaving the yarns. However, the woven textile carries connotations beyond those of merely women's labor.

The *ulos* is a symbol of creation and fertility. In the very process of weaving the woman creates

a new object—a united whole—from seemingly disparate elements. This magical quality can escape none who see the woven cloth emerge behind the moving shuttle. Further, just as music is an experience monitored through time, so too does the total cloth emerge as the finished expression of the metrical time invested in each throw of the weft. The cloth thus becomes a metaphor for both time and fruition.¹³ We can see in the ritual functions of the *ulos* reflections of such interpretations.

From the Bataks of Asahan, Bartlett (1973, fn. 7, p. 138) speaks of the cloth called *hijo marsitogutoguan*. This cloth retains its cylindrical shape because the continuous warp yarns are never cut. It is used at child birth and Bartlett writes, "The continuity of the warp across the gap where the woof had not been woven in was said to be magic to insure the continuity of life from the mother to the child, and 'the going on of the generations.' The birth of the child was represented by the beginning of the woof at one side of the uncut fringe. As one drew the cloth through the hands it represented the growing up of the child, and when the other side of the uncut fringe was reached, it represented the beginning of a new generation whose life would repeat that of the mother, and so indefinitely." Here the cloth metaphorically incorporates time in the cycle of life and the continuity of the generations.

While recalled by only a few, a similar cloth retaining its continuous warp was also once employed by the Toba and Angkola Bataks at weddings. The cloth, called *ulos lobu-lobu*, the enveloping cloth, circled the bridal pair while they ate a ritual meal of the "rice of unification" and *dengke saur*, "the fish of fortunate life." The cloth clearly symbolized their union and longevity.¹⁴

Future time is revealed in the reading of the *ulos ni tondi* or soul cloth. As mentioned above, the designs are believed to prognosticate a pregnant woman's future and the cloth as a whole serves as a guardian of her well being. She harbors this *ragidup* with particular care for its inherent revitalizing and protective powers are sought in the time of child birth (Vergouwen 1964, p. 59) and in cases of her or her child's illness. Indeed the use of the cloth extends to the whole of her family who stands in need of the benedictory powers with which the *hula-hula* have endowed their gift.

The beneficence of time is fertility and growth, and the Batak see their textiles as symbols of these, too. Examination of the objects and ritual activities associated with the New Year ceremonies allows us to draw such interpretations. The rite called *mangase taon*, the cleansing of the year, or *mamele taon*, to make sacrifices to the year, was

traditionally an event in which a buffalo was killed to appease the departing year and welcome the new.¹⁵ During the ceremony a major object used by the *datu*, magician priests, in their celebrated dance is an elaborately carved staff which stands in a basket of rice. Leaves are tied to the top and a three-colored thread wrapped around the uppermost carving. Near the basket of rice are an ordinary *ulos*, a ritual book and a lance. The staff resting in the basket is the tree-of-life and the three nearby objects signify respectively the low, middle and upper worlds of Batak cosmology (Tobing 1956, p. 184). Each of the three *datu* dance while wearing a *ragidup* placed to accentuate his special role in the ceremony. The first, representing the fecund lower world, wears the cloth about his loins and in the course of the dance wraps the magic staff within a *ragidup* and later in a posture of parturition the *datu* gives birth to the staff or tree-of-life itself (Ibid., p. 186). The second *datu* brings from an altar a plate full of rice which he carries on a *ragidup*. After consecrating the dish the *datu* wears the cloth about his waist and upper part of his body while he nourishes the tree-of-life and by the act of feeding takes blessings unto himself. The third *datu* wears the *ragidup* over the right shoulder while he moistens the staff-tree form with water symbolizing the gifts from the upper world. In the final dance, the original *datu* who gave birth to the tree now wears the *ragidup* over the shoulder while he effects the total destruction of all the elements used in the dances. By this destruction he makes possible the renewal and regeneration of the new year.¹⁶ Within this ritual the most sacred of the Batak *ulos*, the *ragidup*, marks the evolution and fructification of the tree-of-life in the manner in which the cloth is worn by the *datu*. Initially, there is the concept of regeneration and birth as the cloth wraps the loins, then abundance of harvest and blessings and life-sustaining rains as the cloth is worn around the waist and then over the shoulder to designate these gifts from the middle and upper worlds. Finally, the ritual destruction of the cosmos with its promise of renewal as the *datu* wears the cloth on his right shoulder to signify his upper world role.

So powerful is the imagery invoked by the use of these textiles that one immediately looks for the metaphorical statement when such an *ulos* appears in a ceremonial context.

In Fig. 11 the *ragidup* appears over the shoulder of a woman while on her head she carries the *sanggul marata*. This is a basket of rice which supports a cluster of leaves including those from the warringin tree, *Ficus religiosa*. The moment portrayed is from the final stages in the funeral of

an elderly grandmother as the eldest son's wife initiates the *dondon tua* dance about the corpse. As his name "weighted with good fortune" implies, this is the moment when the living seek the benevolence and blessing of the deceased. As she stands the eldest son's wife is at once the support for and part of the cosmic tree symbol she carries and her textile marks her role just as it did the *datus*' in the New Year celebration. She now becomes senior representative of the distaff element in her husband's lineage and so embodies the concept of fertility and the continuance of the elements of creation in that family. It is appropriate to see her as a tree-of-life as this role passes from one generation to another.

This and the function of mourning belong to the *hula-hula* and it is they who cover their heads with the somber blue cloths and bewail the deceased. They pile gifts of textiles in the casket that are later distributed throughout the *anak boru* to strengthen the vital force or *sahala* of the family now weakened by death. If the deceased was an elderly person with numerous descendants as in this case 70 or more *ulos* would not be uncommon, but only one of these, a *ragidup*, finally covers the body in burial. The entire gift pattern will be repeated and even expanded to include more distant lineage members years later when the bones are exhumed and ceremonially transferred to a permanent tomb collectively financed by the family. The death of a child would warrant far fewer cloths and the one left in the casket would be a carrying cloth given by the maternal grandmother. In Tarutung it is widely believed this must not be the normal striped carrying cloth, *ulos mangiring*, for this would bring misfortune to all the remaining children in the family.

The blessings that flow from the superior bride givers in the form of *ulos* are at no time more evident than at marriage. In a recent case a wealthy father gave 35 cloths to his daughter's new mother and father-in-law and his extended family endowed the groom with 275 *ulos*. The gift obviously has a monetary aspect as well as spiritual since current prices range from Rp. 2,000 to Rp. 15,000 (U.S.\$5 to \$37.50) or more per cloth. However, it is the act of *mangulosi* or enveloping the in-laws and the bride and groom in the *ulos* which forms the emotional focal point of the wedding ceremony. The father of the bride wraps the mother of the groom in the prestigious *ragidup* (Fig. 12) as a sign of blessing and, indirectly, of the affinal bonds now uniting their families. The bride and groom (who sit to the right in this photograph) are then enveloped in the *rapi hotang*—a cloth more appropriate to their age—amidst blessings for fertility



Fig. 11 The eldest son's wife wearing the *ragidup* carries the *sanggul marata* at the funeral of her mother-in-law. The body will be interred covered with another of these cloths because the woman died leaving a strong and prosperous family. Photograph from the family album of Sutan Badiaradja Sianipar, Balige, North Sumatra.

and a harmonious life together (Fig. 13). We can see that in addition to their abstract symbolism the textiles, through their metaphorical intent become the basis of ceremony as the *hula-hula* physically protects and envelopes the *anak boru* with the cloths.

These same images may be called forth again at later times. If the newly married couple fails to have children within a reasonable time, they will return to the girl's parents bearing a cooked pig to be consumed at a ritual meal at which time they seek the aid of the *sahala* and the *tondi* of the *hula-hula*. The parents respond to these pleas by giving their daughter a *ragidup* or *ulos na so ra buruk*, the "ulos that won't wear out," which is a piece of rice land.¹⁷ Later, when she is pregnant, they once more strengthen their daughter by wrap-

ping her in a *ragidup* which is her *ulos ni tondi* mentioned above. Finally, when a child is born, the new parents carry the infant with small gifts of money and a pig to the maternal grandparents' home where the child receives the *ulos mangiring*—a brightly striped carrying cloth—and the new parents may ask for the *ulos na so ra buruk* if they have not received land earlier. In all of these exchanges the *hula-hula* confers its superior *sahala* on the weakened or threatened soul through the textile images of fertility and the real sources of production enunciated in a textile metaphor—that of an “*ulos* that won't wear out.”

STRUCTURAL SYMBOLISM AND METAPHORICAL INTENT

With the *ulos*—and in particular the *ragidup*—placed in a cultural context, it may now be suggested that there is an integral connection between the manner of weaving this particular textile and its cultural significance as a cloth imbued with the blessings of long life. It is known that Batak myths make the connection between time and the weaving process for they speak of a cultural heroine living in the moon where she spins and weaves (Voorhoeve 1927, pp. 66-67). Also we have seen in the use of the *ulos lobu-lobu* that the Batak invest some cloths with the aspects of time and continuity and that these very same cloths have eccentricities in their warp features. Therefore, it seems extremely probable that in the past the warp which is structured in a continuous passage around the loom was recognized as the primary component in



Fig. 12 The bride's father wraps the groom's mother in a *ragidup* during the marriage ceremony of their children. Photograph from the family album of Sutan Badiaradja Sianipar, Balige, North Sumatra.



Fig. 13 The marriage occurs as the bride's father wraps the bride and groom in a cloth, here a *ragi hotang*. Photograph from the family album of Sutan Badiaradja Sianipar, Balige, North Sumatra.

this symbolism of time. If the warp represents time, the laborious process of interlocking the new white warp into the dark maroon yarns of the center of the *ragidup* may have been seen to lengthen time or bestow additional life. The technical process itself thus became crucial to the formation of the symbol. Individually woven sections were not merely sewn to the center because the metaphoric integrity of the cloth depended upon the extension of an acknowledged span represented in the original maroon warp. In this new time the weaver then immediately establishes the male-female duality which interacts in all time by directly weaving both *pinar halak* motifs before continuing with either panel in its entirety. With such a totality es-

tablished she may now complete each panel in turn.

Thus, the Batak enrich their simple cloths with a host of metaphoric intent centering on time, fruition and protection or strength. Stemming from the bride giver's side, the textiles are physical representatives of these elusive factors that may be given, cherished, used or stored. Some, such as the *ragidup*, claim immense prestige and enter into the exchange at particular phases which are commensurate with their greater real and psychic values, but all *ulos* carry some of the spiritual wealth. They are an integral part of Batak ceremony and ritual and, while time and foreign intrusions may ultimately diminish their number, today in Sumatra they are a thriving part of Batak culture.

ADDITIONAL BATAK CLOTHS THAT FREQUENTLY ENTER INTO THE GIFT EXCHANGE

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The Toba Batak identify close to two dozen *ulos* in addition to those discussed here. While it is possible for all to enter the gift exchange system, the following four cloths are mentioned frequently. The dimensions given are for a known example to indicate what is typical of this type of textile although individual specimens may vary. The photographs are of textiles owned by Batak families taken in Indonesia by the author.

Figure a

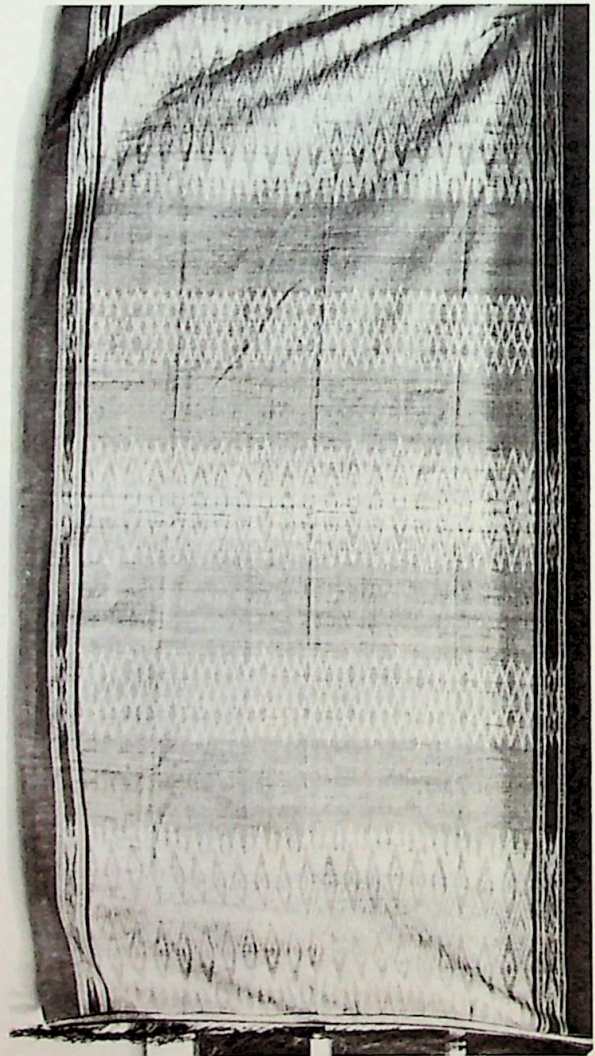


Figure a. *Sibolang* (or *pamontari*) [85 × 44 inches] This is a single cotton warp-faced plain weave panel dyed a pale indigo or occasionally black. Five broad zones of closely spaced warp ikatted patterns in a light blue are arranged evenly across the panel in the weft direction. In addition two or three fine stripes may appear in the warp near the selvage margins in the same light blue as the ikatted geometric designs. The fringe borders are always twined—most often in red, white and black. This is probably the most important of the ikatted textiles among the Toba Batak for in extreme circumstances it may act as a substitute for the *ragidup* or the *ragi hotang* in the gift exchange. In the normal gift-giving pattern the bride's parents present a *sibolang* to the groom's father and to their daughter when she marries. At the time of a death this is a major gift coming from the fathers of the son's wives and others who stand in the position of bride-givers to the dead person. It also serves as the chief mourning cloth a widow receives from her mother. For mourning the cloth is worn on the head, but in normal circumstances it is worn around the waist or over the shoulder.

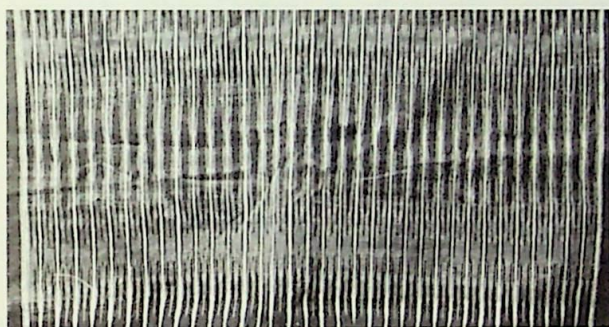


Figure b

Figure b. *Situluntuho*. This is a single cotton panel similar in size to the *sibolang*. The broad center of the cloth is entirely covered with thin evenly spaced light colored warp stripes which are traversed by three broad zones of warp ikatted patterns. These appear across the center and fringe ends of the *ulos*. A twined border finishes the fringe ends. Traditionally indigo was used for this cloth producing pale blue designs on a slightly darker blue base. Now, particularly in the Tarutung region, a chemical black dye has supplanted the blue. People having few financial resources often use this cloth as a wedding garment or even the *ulos ni tondi*, the soul cloth. More commonly, it is an appropriate gift from the bride's father to the groom and is also used as an *adat* gift on such occasions as funerals. Half of a cloth is shown here.



Figure c

Figure c. *Mangiring* [170 × 33 inches]. This is a single warp faced plain weave cotton panel having white selvage edge stripes. These stripes line one side of a solid maroon border which in turn encompasses a broad central zone filled with brightly colored parallel warp stripes. Some of these stripes are ikatted with small V-shaped forms which gives the entire central area a speckled or reticulated appearance. A narrow twined border marks the fringe ends. This is the brightly colored *ulos parompa* or bearing cloth the maternal grandparents give as a carrying cloth when their daughter's first child is born. It is the first of many textile gifts which this family will provide. The cloth is also used by men as the *tali-tali* or head gear on festival occasions. Slightly over one-half of a cloth is shown here.



Figure d

Figure d. *Sadum* [76 × 36 inches]. A smaller form of *sadum* is woven by most Toba groups, but these cloths probably originate with the Angkola Batak who live to the southwest of the Toba. Here they weave two textiles, the *ulos godang* and the *parompa sadum*. The former is made from two basically maroon colored 18 inch-wide panels which are joined to form a cloth 76 × 36 inches; the latter is a single panel approximately 76 inches long and 18 inches wide. The photograph shows one-half of

one panel. In contrast to most Batak textiles which basically depend on ikat patterning for their decoration, all of the designs of these cloths are effected by a weaving process. There are horizontal rows of simple supplementary weft designs placed either on a warp faced weave or in conjunction with a twill faced foundation. Interspersed are an occasional pair of wool twined wefts and at least two deep rows of a pattern worked in wool or cotton by a tapestry wrapping of grouped warp elements. All of these designs are simple geometric forms usually based on a diamond shape. An alternation of two colors forms a narrow woven border at the fringe ends, probably in imitation of twining normally found in this location on other cloths. The final fringe border is a deep row of beads while other beads appear within the cloth and are sewn to the lateral margins. Frequently the body of the textile shows two rows of words wishing the wearer good fortune. While the warp elements are somber maroon and black and a majority of the weft is a maroon, the decorative weft yarns are bright red, yellow, green and even metallic gold colors. Altogether the varying bright colors, different weaves and varied depths of the rows give the impression the cloth is a rather gaudily decorated sampler. The larger cloth is used as a garment and the smaller as a baby carrier and both are regularly employed for all major *adat* commitments among the Angkola. An original or an imitation of the Angkola *parompa sadum* may be given by other Batak groups. The maternal grandparents may give one to a grandchild at a baptism or at a festival held shortly after birth or to a small child who has been absent from the grandparents' home for an extended period. Both cloths serve as highly valued gifts only slightly less exalted than the *ragidup*, but often more appropriate for the receiver's age and station in life.

NOTES

¹The Batak divide into two ardent camps regarding the spelling of this name. Some use two words, *ragi hidup*, while others prefer a condensed form, *ragidup*. Both names carry the same meaning, "pattern of life."

The Tobanese weave another cloth that closely resembles the *ragidup* which they call *penusaan*. While these are almost identical, the latter seem to have somewhat more complex designs in the white end panels as in Fig. 10. Also, the customs surrounding these two types of cloths are variable between different communities. For instance, in the Balige area the *ragidup* is used as a shoulder cloth by women, but not by men who use the *penusaan* in that capacity. However, men may wear

the *ragidup* around the hips and women may not. When the bones are wrapped at the time of secondary burial, these rights are reversed and the bones of a woman are wrapped in the *penusaan* and those of a man in the *ragidup*. In other areas, however, none of these differences in use exist and it is questionable how great and how old this distinction between the two types of cloth may be. It is of interest that the writer Tobing, a Batak himself, makes no mention of the second cloth in his work (Tobing 1956). In this article I treat them as a single type of cloth called *ragidup*.

²*Ikat*, the Indonesian word "tie," is the term Westerners now apply to a resist process of decorating textiles. Patterns are created in the warp (or weft) yarns before weaving by tying off areas which resist penetration of the dyes. After the yarns are dyed and the covering unwrapped, the designs remain in the original color of the yarn.

³Weavers today rarely dye their own yarns, but buy them prepared by other women in the market place. I did not see this dyeing, but was told chemicals were used and, in the case of blue dyes, chemicals combined with indigo. Jasper (1912, pp. 68-69) discusses the traditional dyeing methods.

⁴*Potir* is the term used in the Balige area and *hoting-hoting* is heard in the Tarutung region.

⁵There are numerous references to the use of *bonang manalu* or three color thread. A few are Tobing (1956, pp. 79, 159, 184) and Bartlett (1973, fn. 3, p. 136 and fn. 4, p. 137).

⁶Tobing (1956, pp. 159, 184) explains the three colored threads represent the aspect of the high god and later that the colors themselves symbolize the trinity.

⁷Mrs. H. L. Tobing, a Batak currently teaching at Yale University, has kindly helped with the translations of Batak words.

⁸Jasper (1912, p. 224) names and draws these design elements.

⁹Loeb (1935, p. 68) reports the person without filed teeth was thought to resemble a dog.

¹⁰Jasper (1912, p. 225). The writer also states the uneven number of stripes in the cloth center indicated it was a slave's cloth. It seems unlikely a slave would have such a prestigious cloth.

¹¹The verse and translation are from Mrs. H. L. Tobing.

¹²This story was told to me by an elderly Batak woman, Ibu Kalimuda, in Bogor, Java, in 1964.

¹³Mircea Eliade (1961, pp. 92-115) explores the magical significance and time relationship in knots, cords and weaving in other cultures. Within the Indonesian context Monni Adams (1971) has shown that on Sumba the nomenclature for all stages in the preparation of the yarns for weaving parallels that in actual human gestation and child birth.

¹⁴Personal communication from Raja Sipakko Napitupulu in Balige, Sumatra, January 1975. Vergouwen (1964, p. 182) also speaks of an *ulos lobu-lobu* but it is not clear if this retained its continuous warp form.

¹⁵Tobing (1956, pp. 168, 183 ff.) and Vergouwen (1964, p. 168) after Tobing.

¹⁶This dance is discussed in detail by Wirz (1926-27) and Tobing (1956, pp. 183-189).

¹⁷Victor Hutabarat of Medan, Sumatra, reported the *ragidup* would be given at this time but Vergouwen (1964, pp. 84-85) mentions that land may be given.

Photographs and drawings are by Mattiebelle S. Gittinger, except for Figures 1, 5, 11, 12, and 13.

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Recently the Board of Trustees of the Textile Museum appointed Dr. Gittinger Research Associate for Southeast Asian Textiles.